

**2003**

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**Wisconsin**  
**Marriages**  
**and Divorces**

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*Bureau of Health Information  
Division of Health Care Financing  
Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services*

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# **Wisconsin Marriages and Divorces**

## **2003**

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## Introduction

This report presents key information about marriages and divorces that occurred in Wisconsin in 2003. It also contains information from selected previous years, as well as information on the number and rate of marriages and divorces, both in Wisconsin and nationally. The sources of data for Wisconsin are marriage and divorce certificates on file with the Bureau of Health Information, Division of Health Care Financing, Department of Health and Family Services.

The collection of marriage and divorce data is mandated by Chapter 69 of the Wisconsin Statutes. Chapter 69 authorizes the Department of Health and Family Services to supervise and direct the collection of these data. This statute also specifies how local registrars are to collect and file certificates of marriage.

The Department of Health and Family Services produced this publication. Staff of the Vital Records Registration and Statistics Unit, Bureau of Health Information, collected and compiled the marriage and divorce records. Joyce Knapton drafted the summaries in this report and produced the computer programs to generate the tables. Patricia Nametz edited the report. The report was prepared under the supervision of John Kiesow, State Registrar, Vital Records Section, and Jane Kraus, Supervisor, Registration and Statistics Unit. Susan Wood, Director, Bureau of Health Information, provided overall direction.

The Bureau of Health Information would like to thank the County Clerks for issuing accurate marriage licenses and the local Register of Deeds offices for their accurate recording of all marriage records.

This report is available on the Department of Health and Family Services Web site, at <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/stats>.

Comments, suggestions, and requests for additional marriage or divorce data may be addressed to:

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## Key Findings

- A total of 34,220 marriages occurred in Wisconsin in 2003, representing a slight decrease from the 34,241 marriages that occurred in 2002. These counts reflect all marriages that occurred in Wisconsin (of both residents and non-residents of the state).
- Wisconsin's marriage rate in 2003 was 6.3 per 1,000 total population, identical to the 2002 rate. The marriage rate has gradually declined since 1980, when the rate was 8.7.
- The marriage rate in Wisconsin has been consistently lower than the national rate for more than 80 years. The United States provisional marriage rate for the period January-November, 2003, was 7.6 per 1,000 population.
- The median age for first marriages in 2003 was 24.8 years old for women and 26.4 years old for men. In 1960, the median age at first marriage was 20.4 for brides and 22.9 for grooms.
- Since 1960, the bride in a first marriage, on average, has been approximately two years younger than the groom.
- In 2003, the months with the highest number of marriages were June, August and September. August was the most popular month to marry.
- Milwaukee County had the highest number of marriages in 2003 (5,136), followed by Dane County (2,900), Waukesha County (2,188), and Brown County (1,615). These are Wisconsin's four most populous counties. Each of these counties had a decrease in the number of marriages from 2002 to 2003 except for Dane County, where marriages increased slightly.
- A total of 17,150 divorces occurred in Wisconsin in 2003, for a divorce rate of 3.1 per 1,000 total population. This is slightly lower than the 2002 rate (3.2).
- The divorce rate in Wisconsin has been consistently lower than the national rate for more than 80 years. For the 12 months ending with November 2003, the provisional United States divorce rate was 3.8.
- In 2003, the total number of Wisconsin divorces was 50 percent of the total number of Wisconsin marriages. This is slightly lower than the 2002 percentage (51 percent).
- The highest number of divorces occurred in Milwaukee County (2,615 divorces and 15 annulments), followed by Dane County (1,382 divorces and 5 annulments) and Waukesha County (973 divorces and 3 annulments), reflecting the large populations of these three counties.
- Fifty-four percent of all Wisconsin divorces in 2003 involved families with children under 18 years of age. Among divorces involving families with children, an average of 1.8 children were affected by each divorce.

**Table 1. Marriages and Marriage Rates, Wisconsin and United States, Selected Years, 1920-2003**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Wisconsin Marriages</b>	<b>Wisconsin Marriage Rate*</b>	<b>United States Marriage Rate*</b>
1920	22,293	8.4	12.0
1925	16,385	5.8	10.3
1930	15,328	5.2	9.2
1935	21,075	6.9	10.4
1940	23,379	7.5	12.1
1945	25,269	8.5	12.2
1950	29,081	8.4	11.1
1955	25,543	7.0	9.3
1960	24,573	6.2	8.5
1965	28,410	6.7	9.3
1970	34,415	7.8	10.6
1975	35,888	7.9	10.0
1980	41,113	8.7	10.6
1985	40,014	8.4	10.1
1990	38,934	8.0	9.8
1995	36,354	7.1	8.9
2000	36,100	6.7	8.5
2001	34,790	6.5	8.4
2002	34,241	6.3	7.9
2003	34,220	6.3	7.6

Source: U.S. marriage rates are from the National Center for Health Statistics, *National Vital Statistics Reports*. Wisconsin numbers and rates are from the Bureau of Health Information, Division of Health Care Financing, Department of Health and Family Services. The Wisconsin marriage rate for 2003 was calculated using 2002 population figures.

\* Rates shown are marriages per 1,000 total population.

Notes: The Wisconsin numbers and rates reflect marriages that occurred in Wisconsin. The U.S. marriage rate for 2002 is provisional based on marriages that occurred January-November, 2002. The U.S. marriage rate for 2003 is provisional based on marriages that occurred January-November, 2003.

- A total of 34,220 marriages occurred in Wisconsin in 2003, representing a slight decrease from the 34,241 marriages that occurred in 2002.
- Wisconsin's marriage rate in 2003 was 6.3 per 1,000 total population, identical to the 2002 rate. The marriage rate has gradually declined since 1980, when the rate was 8.7.

**Table 2. Median Age at First Marriage and All Remarriages, Wisconsin 1960-2003**

	First Marriages		All Remarriages	
<u>Year</u>	<u>Bride</u>	<u>Groom</u>	<u>Bride</u>	<u>Groom</u>
1960	20.4	22.9	39.9	45.1
1965	20.6	22.5	40.4	45.2
1970	20.8	22.6	37.4	42.6
1975	20.8	22.7	32.4	37.1
1980	21.7	23.5	31.7	34.9
1985	22.9	24.7	33.7	36.9
1990	23.8	25.5	38.3	41.6
1991	23.9	25.6	38.6	41.7
1992	24.1	25.7	38.8	42.3
1993	24.2	25.8	39.0	42.0
1994	24.3	25.8	39.4	42.3
1995	24.5	26.0	39.9	42.6
1996	24.6	26.2	40.4	43.6
1997	24.6	26.3	40.7	43.4
1998	24.6	26.3	41.1	43.9
1999	24.6	26.3	41.6	44.5
2000	24.7	26.3	41.7	44.6
2001	24.7	26.3	42.3	45.2
2002	24.8	26.3	42.9	45.5
2003	24.8	26.4	43.3	46.0

Source: Bureau of Health Information, Division of Health Care Financing, Department of Health and Family Services.

Note: The median age is one way of expressing the average age, and represents the midpoint of all persons in the group (half are older and half are younger than the median age). For example, in 2000 the median age for brides at first marriage was 24.7, meaning that half of all brides being married for the first time in 2000 were younger, and half were older, than 24.7. The numbers in this table reflect all marriages that occurred in Wisconsin in the stated years.

- The median age for first marriages in 2003 was 24.8 years old for women and 26.4 years old for men. In 1960, the median age at first marriage was 20.4 for brides and 22.9 for grooms.
- Since 1960, the bride in a first marriage, on average, has been approximately two years younger than the groom.



**Table 3. Marriages and Remarriages by Age of Bride and Groom, Wisconsin 2003**

Age in Years	Bride					Groom				
	Total Marriages	First	Second	Third	Fourth or More	Total Marriages	First	Second	Third	Fourth or More
	34,220	24,047	7,907	1,865	401	34,220	24,379	7,823	1,715	303
16	104	104				6	6			
17	128	128				32	32			
18	558	558				180	180			
19	867	867				395	395			
20	1,257	1,248	9			664	664			
21	1,555	1,534	21			1,034	1,029	5		
22	2,109	2,072	37			1,483	1,476	7		
23	2,590	2,516	74			1,907	1,886	21		
24	2,509	2,402	107			2,262	2,226	36		
25-29	8,847	7,834	957	52	4	9,492	8,927	550	15	
30-34	4,572	2,829	1,538	192	13	5,630	4,271	1,264	89	6
35-39	2,922	1,024	1,522	319	57	3,537	1,780	1,526	216	15
40-44	2,378	525	1,353	412	88	2,691	903	1,436	303	49
45-49	1,742	247	1,001	392	102	1,912	355	1,116	379	62
50-54	955	98	561	229	67	1,238	157	735	284	62
55-59	484	32	291	128	33	732	46	443	193	50
60-64	275	15	172	64	24	446	23	271	116	36
65-69	159	7	109	37	6	228	12	145	56	15
70-74	128	4	92	27	5	144	7	100	31	6
75+	81	3	63	13	2	207	4	168	33	2

Source: Bureau of Health Information, Division of Health Care Financing, Department of Health and Family Services.

Note: Totals shown represent marriages that occurred in Wisconsin in 2003.

- For first-time brides and grooms, the highest number of marriages occurred between the ages of 22 and 29.
- In 2003, first-time grooms in Wisconsin outnumbered first-time brides by over 300.

## Marriages

**Table 4. Monthly Marriage Totals by County, Wisconsin 2003**

<b>County</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Jan</b>	<b>Feb</b>	<b>Mar</b>	<b>Apr</b>	<b>May</b>	<b>Jun</b>	<b>Jul</b>	<b>Aug</b>	<b>Sep</b>	<b>Oct</b>	<b>Nov</b>	<b>Dec</b>
<b>State Total</b>	<b>34,220</b>	<b>1,261</b>	<b>1,685</b>	<b>1,672</b>	<b>1,799</b>	<b>3,720</b>	<b>4,326</b>	<b>3,434</b>	<b>4,816</b>	<b>4,222</b>	<b>3,873</b>	<b>1,787</b>	<b>1,625</b>
Adams	127	6	7	4	12	12	16	16	13	17	13	3	8
Ashland	130	5	8	3	4	8	15	14	23	22	19	4	5
Barron	357	16	18	12	23	47	43	36	53	36	38	15	20
Bayfield	138	4	6	4	3	12	21	19	24	28	9	5	3
Brown	1,615	68	66	61	87	193	217	167	218	184	186	89	79
Buffalo	76	1	6	2	7	8	13	8	11	8	9	2	1
Burnett	97		8	3	4	5	16	10	15	24	7		5
Calumet	233	11	11	6	9	22	29	23	37	33	36	10	6
Chippewa	414	16	23	16	15	51	53	32	66	55	49	18	20
Clark	194	5	10	2	9	24	25	19	27	29	32	9	3
Columbia	389	14	20	15	19	51	40	35	52	44	47	26	26
Crawford	124	2	4	2	5	13	22	11	24	20	12	6	3
Dane	2,900	118	134	154	146	311	370	302	403	349	314	162	137
Dodge	465	13	26	31	20	51	50	36	66	54	61	33	24
Door	406	9	15	9	15	40	60	47	73	65	40	12	21
Douglas	294	7	21	12	11	25	37	33	52	28	34	13	21
Dunn	262	7	16	15	13	23	28	25	40	33	29	18	15
Eau Claire	663	24	32	26	40	69	91	64	91	94	70	24	38
Florence	22		2	1	2	3	1	3	7	3			
Fond du Lac	667	30	40	29	43	80	74	67	83	90	72	24	35
Forest	64	3	9	3	5	1	7	3	9	7	9	3	5
Grant	308	6	17	11	13	33	39	32	51	41	35	18	12
Green	172	8	4	7	10	20	20	25	15	27	19	8	9
Green Lake	150	6	6	6	5	16	22	16	25	25	15	4	4
Iowa	175	5	6	10	9	10	28	14	25	26	24	10	8
Iron	51	4	3		3		9	7	8	6	7	2	2
Jackson	119	2	5	4	9	18	12	17	21	14	7	7	3
Jefferson	448	23	14	39	25	52	49	36	48	58	51	27	26
Juneau	193	7	13	8	8	27	31	14	25	22	24	7	7
Kenosha	811	28	51	44	41	83	94	92	104	104	80	46	44
Kewaunee	125	1	3	8	4	15	17	16	15	15	17	6	8
La Crosse	728	31	40	22	33	79	95	64	102	82	110	26	44
Lafayette	86	3	5	5	6	7	10	7	16	6	9	3	9
Langlade	124	4	11	8	4	8	18	12	22	15	14	3	5
Lincoln	187	5	12	9	11	22	29	17	31	19	20	6	6
Manitowoc	510	22	23	22	35	58	54	47	77	59	63	28	22
Marathon	862	28	42	42	36	98	109	96	140	98	100	46	27
Marinette	279	9	10	16	11	21	40	30	48	32	36	12	14
Marquette	95	1	5	9	8	5	13	9	16	13	11	2	3
Menominee	18			1		1	4	3	1	1	2	4	1
Milwaukee	5,136	251	282	298	317	555	603	491	674	559	546	306	254
Monroe	344	8	24	29	30	43	40	35	35	39	28	20	13

## Marriages

**Table 4. Monthly Marriage Totals by County, Wisconsin 2003**

<u>County</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Jan</u>	<u>Feb</u>	<u>Mar</u>	<u>Apr</u>	<u>May</u>	<u>Jun</u>	<u>Jul</u>	<u>Aug</u>	<u>Sep</u>	<u>Oct</u>	<u>Nov</u>	<u>Dec</u>
Oconto	188	6	5	13	5	23	23	20	28	24	23	9	9
Oneida	289	13	16	13	12	21	31	26	49	44	32	18	14
Outagamie	1,230	41	61	66	62	140	140	113	155	155	167	71	59
Ozaukee	459	16	12	26	21	44	56	45	62	63	57	31	26
Pepin	55	2	1	2	5	8	6	3	9	8	8	3	
Pierce	201	6	5	10	8	16	21	15	38	36	29	7	10
Polk	274	10	13	10	15	26	46	31	45	29	32	7	10
Portage	409	10	19	18	23	51	60	34	60	52	37	19	26
Price	74	2	3	4	5	9	9	6	9	14	9	2	2
Racine	976	23	60	59	58	99	119	105	148	114	97	57	37
Richland	137	3	9	6	6	18	22	15	14	18	13	6	7
Rock	894	36	37	53	40	96	106	80	128	114	109	48	47
Rusk	94	6	5	2	1	6	20	11	15	10	10	5	3
St. Croix	414	8	18	17	26	43	64	41	75	40	42	18	22
Sauk	451	14	23	32	33	43	39	39	65	53	56	27	27
Sawyer	137	7	5	2	9	12	13	10	21	26	15	7	10
Shawano	223	9	17	8	8	28	22	21	28	28	29	13	12
Sheboygan	744	31	31	36	36	82	92	92	97	92	89	31	35
Taylor	123	6	7	5	8	15	21	16	11	19	10	1	4
Trempealeau	149	1	6	11	8	14	17	20	19	21	14	10	8
Vernon	190	5	5	6	13	21	37	17	32	18	19	6	11
Vilas	148	5	3	1	5	15	21	23	23	29	15	4	4
Walworth	799	24	34	36	35	91	96	82	111	101	103	43	43
Washburn	125	3	6	8	7	8	22	11	13	14	20	3	10
Washington	639	18	27	30	37	73	83	57	94	84	73	39	24
Waukesha	2,188	73	91	98	94	268	292	230	304	282	256	127	73
Waupaca	436	16	21	12	20	61	63	45	60	55	50	19	14
Waushara	150	5	11	12	8	10	21	12	14	18	14	9	16
Winnebago	944	27	56	43	51	110	127	109	133	105	90	46	47
Wood	522	24	20	25	30	49	73	55	70	72	51	34	19

Source: Bureau of Health Information, Division of Health Care Financing, Department of Health and Family Services.

Note: These numbers represent marriages that occurred in Wisconsin in 2003.

- In 2003, the months with the highest number of marriages were June, August and September. August was the most popular month to marry.
- Milwaukee County had the highest number of marriages in 2003 (5,136), followed by Dane County (2,900), Waukesha County (2,188), and Brown County (1,615). These are Wisconsin's four most populous counties. Each of these counties had a decrease in the number of marriages from 2002 to 2003 except for Dane County, where marriages increased slightly.
- The lowest number of marriages occurred in the counties of Menominee (18), Florence (22) and Iron (51).

**Table 5. Divorces and Divorce Rates, Wisconsin and United States, Selected Years, 1920-2003**

<u>Year</u>	<u>Number of Wisconsin Divorces</u>	<u>Wisconsin Divorce Rate*</u>	<u>United States Divorce Rate*</u>
1920	2,425	0.9	1.6
1925	2,467	0.9	1.5
1930	2,553	0.9	1.6
1935	3,543	1.2	1.7
1940	3,599	1.1	2.0
1945	6,393	2.2	3.5
1950	4,845	1.4	2.6
1955	4,720	1.3	2.3
1960	3,672	0.9	2.2
1965	5,232	1.2	2.5
1970	8,930	2.0	3.5
1975	13,187	2.9	4.8
1980	17,589	3.7	5.2
1985	16,596	3.5	5.0
1990	17,727	3.6	4.7
1995	17,313	3.4	4.4
2000	17,388	3.2	4.2
2001	17,457	3.3	4.0
2002	17,471	3.2	4.0
2003	17,150	3.1	3.8

Source: U.S. divorce rates are from the National Center for Health Statistics, *National Vital Statistics Reports*. Wisconsin numbers and rates are from the Bureau of Health Information, Division of Health Care Financing, Department of Health and Family Services. The Wisconsin divorce rate for 2003 was calculated using 2002 population figures.

\* Rates shown are divorces and annulments per 1,000 total population.

Notes: The Wisconsin numbers and rates represent divorces and annulments occurring in Wisconsin. The U.S. divorce rate for 2003 is provisional. It is based on divorces that occurred in the 12 months ending with November 2003.

- A total of 17,150 divorces occurred in Wisconsin in 2003, for a divorce rate of 3.1 per 1,000 population. This is slightly lower than the 2002 rate (3.2).
- In 2003, the total number of Wisconsin divorces was 50 percent of the total number of Wisconsin marriages. This is slightly lower than the 2002 percentage (51 percent).

**Table 6. Divorces and Annulments by County, Wisconsin 2003**

<u>County</u>	<u>Divorces</u>	<u>Annulments</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>Divorces</u>	<u>Annulments</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>17,099</b>	<b>51</b>			
Adams	70		Marathon	327	
Ashland	44		Marinette	136	
Barron	190		Marquette	54	
Bayfield	48		Menominee	3	
Brown	731		Milwaukee	2,615	15
Buffalo	40		Monroe	181	
Burnett	39		Oconto	130	
Calumet	120	1	Oneida	143	
Chippewa	240	2	Outagamie	592	2
Clark	98		Ozaukee	219	2
Columbia	177		Pepin	10	
Crawford	52		Pierce	139	
Dane	1,382	5	Polk	148	1
Dodge	292		Portage	189	
Door	81		Price	71	1
Douglas	149		Racine	515	1
Dunn	105		Richland	57	
Eau Claire	295	2	Rock	599	5
Florence	15		Rusk	60	
Fond du Lac	326		St. Croix	223	3
Forest	27		Sauk	248	1
Grant	125		Sawyer	66	
Green	125		Shawano	140	
Green Lake	65		Sheboygan	324	1
Iowa	69		Taylor	47	
Iron	21		Trempealeau	99	
Jackson	75		Vernon	83	
Jefferson	294		Vilas	58	
Juneau	100		Walworth	327	
Kenosha	553	2	Washburn	54	
Kewaunee	43		Washington	406	1
La Crosse	343		Waukesha	973	3
Lafayette	40		Waupaca	184	
Langlade	84		Waushara	87	1
Lincoln	104		Winnebago	535	1
Manitowoc	223		Wood	272	1

Source: Bureau of Health Information, Division of Health Care Financing, Department of Health and Family Services.

Note: These numbers represent divorces and annulments that occurred in Wisconsin in 2003.

- The highest number of divorces occurred in Milwaukee County (2,615 divorces and 15 annulments), followed by Dane County (1,382 divorces and 5 annulments) and Waukesha County (973 divorces and 3 annulments), reflecting the large populations of these three counties.
- The lowest number of divorces occurred in the counties of Menominee (3 divorces), Pepin (10 divorces) and Florence (15 divorces).

## Divorces

**Table 7. Divorces Affecting Children Under 18 Years of Age by County, Wisconsin 2003**

<u>County</u>	<u>Divorces Granted</u>	<u>Those Affecting Children &lt; 18</u>	<u>No. of Children &lt; 18 Affected</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>Divorces Granted</u>	<u>Those Affecting Children &lt; 18</u>	<u>No. of Children &lt; 18 Affected</u>
<b>State Total</b>	<b>17,150</b>	<b>9,322</b>	<b>17,204</b>				
Adams	70	37	66	Marathon	327	188	382
Ashland	44	31	59	Marinette	136	81	159
Barron	190	115	224	Marquette	54	24	44
Bayfield	48	22	39	Menominee	3	1	3
Brown	731	420	748	Milwaukee	2,630	1,328	2,495
Buffalo	40	18	38	Monroe	181	110	210
Burnett	39	18	30	Oconto	130	66	109
Calumet	121	66	111	Oneida	143	83	149
Chippewa	242	147	274	Outagamie	594	351	618
Clark	98	57	103	Ozaukee	221	115	203
Columbia	177	102	200	Pepin	10	6	13
Crawford	52	26	51	Pierce	139	80	156
Dane	1,387	713	1,291	Polk	149	84	167
Dodge	292	172	290	Portage	189	101	189
Door	81	44	83	Price	72	35	69
Douglas	149	84	176	Racine	516	280	522
Dunn	105	53	111	Richland	57	35	66
Eau Claire	297	150	293	Rock	604	341	614
Florence	15	7	15	Rusk	60	27	55
Fond du Lac	326	179	326	St. Croix	226	125	221
Forest	27	17	39	Sauk	249	131	238
Grant	125	68	132	Sawyer	66	36	69
Green	125	71	115	Shawano	140	75	124
Green Lake	65	30	60	Sheboygan	325	186	356
Iowa	69	39	83	Taylor	47	21	39
Iron	21	9	13	Trempealeau	99	55	100
Jackson	75	41	71	Vernon	83	46	83
Jefferson	294	156	295	Vilas	58	27	47
Juneau	100	59	100	Walworth	327	178	343
Kenosha	555	324	581	Washburn	54	25	48
Kewaunee	43	25	44	Washington	407	245	444
La Crosse	343	192	360	Waukesha	976	539	1,009
Lafayette	40	23	42	Waupaca	184	105	186
Langlade	84	39	61	Waushara	88	44	86
Lincoln	104	52	85	Winnebago	536	267	492
Manitowoc	223	123	228	Wood	273	152	259

Source: Bureau of Health Information, Division of Health Care Financing, Department of Health and Family Services.

Note: These numbers represent divorces and annulments that occurred in Wisconsin in 2003.

- Fifty-four percent of all Wisconsin divorces in 2003 involved couples with children under 18 years of age. Among divorces involving children, an average of 1.8 children were affected by each divorce.

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## **Technical Notes**

### **Marriage Reporting Requirements**

As specified in Chapter 69, Wisconsin Statutes, the following is a brief outline of the sequence of events which take place when a marriage occurs in Wisconsin:

- The filing party (officiant) must register the certificate of marriage with the local Register of Deeds (where the marriage took place) within 3 days after the event.
- The local Register of Deeds must transmit the marriage certificate to the State Registrar within 10 working days after its receipt.

### **Divorce Reporting Requirements**

As specified in Chapter 69, Wisconsin Statutes, the following is what takes place when a divorce occurs in Wisconsin:

- At the end of every biweekly period the filing party (clerk of any court) must send to the State Registrar a report of every divorce or annulment of marriage granted during that period. (This is the only legal document pertaining to vital records that is not filed by the local Register of Deeds.)